CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

For more than six decades, situation in North-east India is a matter of great concern to the states as well as to the centre. One of the reasons for such concern is the growing assertion of various ethnic groups and its impact on the politics of the region. In Northeast India, different ethnic groups which represent both Tribal and non-Tribal communities have been struggling long either for special constitutional safeguard or for the creation of separate political entities on the basis of their lingo-cultural identities. With passage of time, the number of disgruntled groups asserting for such demands has gone up. Few of them are even trying to secede from the state on various identity questions. Some extremist groups are also active in the region with the motto to preserve the distinct cultural identity of their communities. On the whole, there is a situation of perennial law and order problem. An undifferentiated picture of nameless ‘insurgencies’ and Indian soldiers engaged in the defense of the nation dominate popular impression of the region.

The answer to such state of affairs perhaps lies in history. Over a long period of time people of different ethno-cultural identity came and settled in Northeast India. With time, they became the inhabitants of this land. The co-existence of people of diverse cultural backgrounds resulted in the emergence and evolution of
a composite culture in the region (Akoijam 2009: 41). This cosmopolitan culture evolved during the Ahom rule (1228-1826) and came to be known as ‘Assamese Culture’ or ‘Axomiya Sanskriti’ in the days to come. It carried with it the elements of various smaller cultures the exact roots of which are not quite known and which have intermingled with the mainstream culture of the region with passage of time. But this composite ‘Assamese’ culture that had evolved along time did not last long. It declined gradually and collapsed in the second half of the 20th century. There are number of factors that weakened the foundation and led to the eventual decline of that broad Assamese culture known as “Axomiya Sanskriti” which once accommodated various ethnic and linguistic groups of Northeast India within its ambit. However, the two factors that had been most instrumental in the process of degeneration were the impact of modern civilization and the chauvinistic attitude and the attempt of the Assamese to dominate over numerous other smaller communities of the region (Brahma 2008: 235). However, with the gradual decline of “Axomiya Sanskriti” a reverse trend was observed. Instead of trying to assimilate any further, different ethnic groups of the region began trying to assert their identities. There was a general sense of identity crisis and various distinct tribal groups in the region have got to the task of rediscovering their original identity through several movements both peaceful and violent. This ultimately resulted in the creation of several new states in Northeast India like Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1971), Mizoram (1986) and Arunachal Pradesh (1986) all of which were once part and parcel of Assam. What has added fuel to the fire is the role of the ruling elites. They preferred to use the ethno-cultural consciousness and sentiments of various communities of Northeast to reap political dividends. People were mobilized and there initiated many movements in Northeast. The example of Assam movement may be cited in this regard. Many believe that the Anti Foreigners’ Agitation in Assam during late 1970s and early 1980s was, to a great extent, orchestrated by the Assamese elites. ‘The slogan that ‘Asamiyas are in danger in Assam’ which the Assam Movement took forcefully to the Assamese masses, and mobilized them politically to the streets by organizing various protest actions under the leadership of the Asamiya ruling class, was not then a real issue. Though it pleads a national cause, it
represents only its own limited class interests. It articulates its own class interests as the interest of the entire nation/nationality… In order to protect and enhance its class interests and hegemony over the society in Assam, the Assamese ruling class led the Assam movement very tacitly” (Hussain 1995: 253). In another context, it was further observed that the language movement of Assam was nothing but the handiwork of the ruling authority. The demand for Assamese as an official language in 1960s and medium of instruction in 1970s were although apparently seemed to have been backed by students and the middle class, the movement was actually instigated by the political leaders. It was due to this, the movement gained popularity before the general elections of 1962 and 1972 (Goswami 1997: 107). However, in some cases, the role of the ruling elites was unifying too. Instead of dividing the society, they paved the path of unity and development. For example, Pu Laldenga played a remarkable role in stabilizing and bringing peace to Mizoram. During the time of ‘Mautam famine’ (1959) in Mizoram, Laldenga took the initiative to rehabilitate the victims of the famine and earned reputation. Under his leadership demands were made before the Government of Assam for the rehabilitation of the victims. But the response of the Government was not satisfactory. As a result, Pu Laldenga along with his followers turned underground and launched the movement for a separate state of Mizoram during 1960s. The state opposed the movement virulently and people had to suffer a lot. However, ultimately the Mizo Accord was signed in 1986 and the state of Mizoram was created. Today, Mizoram is regarded as the most peaceful state in Northeast India. Pu Lalthanhawla, on the other hand, was the chief Minister of the Union Territory of Mizoram during the time of Mizo Accord. In order to ensure the smooth passage of the Accord, he resigned from the post of chief Minister and agreed to act as Deputy Chief Minister. He sacrificed his political interest for the sake of peace and tranquility in Mizoram. In Assam, Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi played an important role in bringing peace, unity and stability to the state. As a Gandhian and first Chief Minister of the state, he worked successfully for the rehabilitation of the millions of Hindu refugees who left the then East Pakistan at the aftermath of the partition of the country. Under his leadership, 33 tribal belt and blocks were also created in
Chapter-1

Assam. Due to his contribution towards the nation in general and the state in particular, he was conferred Bharat Ratna, the highest Civilian Award of the country, in 1999 (posthumously).

Whatever be the factor instigating from behind, the problem of identity crisis is a reality throughout the world. It would not be an exaggeration to state that almost all the countries of the world have witnessed some forms of unrest relating to identity issue. However, most of such troubles seem to have originated from ethnic identity consciousness not only in case of Northeast India but in case of various other countries as well. The wave of ethnicity and ethnic political mobilization took such a pervasive character that its challenges were felt equally by both developed and developing states. For example, Srilanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Turkey, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Rwanda, Philippines, Australia, Canada, former Yugoslavia, Germany and the former USSR are some of the countries which have faced and are still facing the problem of ethnicity and ethnic identity conflict. Such pattern of conflicts has been described as ‘internal’ or ‘civil’ war largely because it involves a clash of identities based on ethnicity (Hagg & Kagwanja 2007: 12). Ethnicity is the manifestation of sentiments and emotions of a group which is in pursuit to preserve its separate identity. Such sense of distinct identity generally rests on the belief of uniqueness about one’s own culture and tradition. From instrumental (acting as a means of achieving something) viewpoint, ethnicity is the creation of elites who in order to maintain their status quo or to gain political and economic advantage induce and mobilize identity consciousness within a group (Brass 1999: 15). Primordialists, on the other hand, believe that ethnicity is a natural and given phenomenon. According to them, every individual carries with him some “attachments derived from his/her place of birth, kinship relationship, religion, language and social practices which are natural to him, spiritual in nature and that provide a basis for an easy affinity with other people from the same background” (1999: 69). Thus, there are different meanings attached to ethnicity. Schaefer in his study considers 'relative deprivation' as the potential cause of ethnic conflicts leading to extreme situations such as riots, insurgency, civil war and other
instances of social deviations such as crime (Schaefer 2008: 69). Rational Choice theory, on the other hand, considers ethnic identity movement as a product of human choice and decision. It argues that the likelihood of collective action does not rest on factors like the degree of inequality or changing level of relative deprivation. Rather, it believes that any ethnic group will be engaged in collective action only when they estimate that by doing so they will receive a net individual benefit (Hutchinson & Smith 2009: 28). Similarly, Constructivist approach considers ethnic identity of individuals as a dynamic concept. Individuals, according to this approach, go on changing their ethnic identity on the basis of their needs. Very often, they identify themselves with that identity which gives them more advantages - socially, politically or economically. Whatever may be the reason, conflicts and movements based on ethnic identity are increasing throughout the world and its forces are felt more in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies like India. Since its independence, India has been facing the crisis and troubles based on language, religion and ethnic/caste identity. The country was divided between India and Pakistan on religious considerations. Millions of people were butchered and rendered homeless during partition. But the story did not end here. To fulfill the demands resonating from various linguistic groups, the Nation was reorganized again during 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Besides, the country also witnessed the emergence of various tribal movements in different parts of it since the 19th century “of which a few have developed into bitter, violent, and secessionist movements directed against non-tribals, against state governments and against the Government of India itself” (Brass 2010: 151). Some of them were fought for socio-economic deprivations while some others were mobilized to fight political marginalization and exclusion. For instance in Santalparganas and Chhotanagpur region of Bihar, Jharkhand movement was launched. The movement for separate Gorkhaland is also going on in Darjeeling district of West Bengal since 1907. In Punjab, a secessionist movement was launched to create a separate Sikh country (known as Khalistan) under the leadership of Jagjit Singh Chauhan. The movement turned violent in 80s and resulted into counter-militancy operations led by the Indian Security Forces. Operation Blue Star and Operation Black Thunder were
launched in 1984 and 1988 respectively to remove Sikh separatists who were believed to be hiding in the Golden Temple of Amritsar. Consequently, a ban was imposed on the use of religious shrines for political and military purposes and increased penalties for the possession and use of illegal weapons, as part of its strategy to fight extremism in Punjab region (The New York Times, 29-05-1988). Reference may be made to the Telengana movement in Andhra Pradesh in which the demand for a separate state is going on since 1950s. The recent initiative of the Central Government in the year 2009 for the creation of a separate state of Telengana could not be realized due to the strong opposition of the leaders from coastal region of Andhra Pradesh. On 23rd December, 2011 the Government of India announced that no action would be taken on Telengana issue until a consensus is reached by all the parties in Andhra Pradesh. This decision of the government of India was strongly protested by the supporters of the new state of Telengana and hence the Telengana movement still continues. In fact, all the above mentioned movements were based on identity issues. Jharkhand movement in Bihar was launched to preserve the distinct tribal identity of Santhals. Khalistan movement in Punjab was directed to carve out an independent Sikh country, while the Gorkhaland movement was motivated by Gorkha identity issue. Likewise, the Telengana movement was also the outcome of the identity crisis of the Telegu speaking people of Andhra Pradesh. The problem in Northeast India is somewhat like this or even worse to that. The cultural fabric and the demographic pattern of Northeast are far more critical. This intricacy in the socio-cultural life of Northeast India has always provided a congenial atmosphere for the growth of ethnicity and identity politics in the region. The initiation of the struggle for identity in the region began first in Nagaland which was a hill district of the then Assam. The people of this hill district started the agitation for their distinct identity during 1940s. On the eve of India’s independence, Naga leaders appealed to the British Government for their independence with the rationale that no Indian power had ever conquered them (Rajagopalan 2008: 13). Accordingly, an accord (known as Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord 1947) was signed between the Governor of Assam and the Naga National Council (NNC), a representative body of eleven tribes of Nagaland. The pact
ensured that the rights of the Nagas would be preserved and an opportunity to develop would be ensured for them. However, a section of the leadership within the NNC rejected the agreement and declared independence on 14th August 1947 (2008: 14). But their demand failed to receive due attention from the Government. As a result, under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo who happened to be the leader of the NNC a plebiscite was conducted in Nagaland in 1951. As per the result of the plebiscite, about 99 percent population of the state wanted to secede from India. But the result of the plebiscite went in vain. The Government of India did not pay any heed to the demand of secession. In response to the Government of India’s attitude, the movement for Sovereign Nagaland started. After more than a decade struggle, the Government agreed to create a separate state for Nagas and the state of Nagaland was born on December 1, 1963. But the creation of a separate state could not resolve the crisis in Nagaland. It was opposed by a section of the NNC leaders and as a result, an underground organization named National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) was formed in 1980 with the demand of Sovereign Nagaland. However, NSCN got split into two in 1988 leading to the birth of Isak-Muivah and Kaplang group of NSCN. At present, both Isak-Muivah and Kaplang groups of NSCN are in ceasefire agreement with the Government of India. Both the parties, though opposed to each other, are pressing the Government to fulfill their demand for Sovereign Nagaland which encompasses all the Naga-inhabited areas of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and some portions of Myanmar. This made the process of negotiations extremely critical. Although oldest, Naga unrest is not unique to the region of Northeast. There are similar disturbances in other states of Northeast as well. For example, in Assam the continuous flow of illegal migrants from Bangladesh and Nepal during the colonial and post-colonial period created a competitive atmosphere in which many small and relatively backward communities of the state were marginalized. Their sense of deprivation deepened due to the homogenizing policies of the Government of Assam. A sense of deprivation and identity crisis took on the people of various minority groups in the state. Such sense of identity crisis in the long run paved the way for several ethnic identity movements in the state. Among them, the ethnic identity
movement of the Bodos, Rabhas, and Rajbongshis are notable. Insurgent groups like United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB), Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO) and so on are also the outcome of such perennial movements in the state. The proximity of the state to the neighboring countries like Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, China and Bangladesh has further complicated the situation. Many a time, these countries provided the safe haven for the terrorists and as such made the solution of the problem difficult. The situation is more or less similar in the states of Tripura, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh also. In Tripura, the tribals launched a violent movement during 1980s and 1990s against the migrants from Bangladesh. Manipur is also under continuous conflicts between Nagas and Kukis, Kukis and Paites and Maiteis and Muslims since 1990s. Arunachal Pradesh is often described as the parking place for different insurgent groups of Northeast (Hussain 2005: 76). Thus, there is hardly any state in Northeast India which is free from the fire of ethnic conflict and identity movement. The cumulative effect of such situation is very negative. In course of time, it not only turned Northeast into a hot bed of politics but also jeopardized the economic development of the region. “With its controversial human rights record and sluggish economic growth rates”, Sanjib Baruah remarked, “Northeast India is a counterpoint to India’s image as mature democracy, a dynamic economy, and an emerging major power” (Baruah 2011: vii). As a matter of fact, there are inter-linkages between insecurity, underdevelopment and insurgency in Northeast India (Das 2012: xxvi). Economic underdevelopment creates unemployment, unemployment generates insurgency and insurgency in turn generates insecurity leading to further economic underdevelopment.

When this is the general scenario of Northeast, with regard to Assam where the study was undertaken, it may be said that the genesis of ethnic conflicts and ethnic identity movements in the state lies in its colonial past and the British policy of ‘divide and rule’ (Kumar 2007: 111-112). In the name of Tea plantation in Assam, the British Government occupied large parts of fertile land in Darrang and Kamrup districts of the state. A large number of labourers were imported
from the neighboring states like Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu to work as tea garden labourers in Assam (Narjinary 2000: 13). Such continuous flow of migration has seriously affected the demographic pattern of the region and created a sense of dissatisfaction among the native people. As a result, the natives started agitating. On 14th September, 1928 the Bodos of Assam in particular and the plains tribals in general submitted number of memorandums to the Simon Commission demanding their basic socio-economic and political rights. They appealed to the Commission for an adequate and effective representation of the Kachari community by giving them two reserved seats in the State Assembly (Memorandum submitted to the Simon Commission, 1928). Accordingly, four seats of Assam Legislative Assembly were reserved by the Government of India Act 1935 for the tribals. However, the socio-economic problems like land-alienation and economic marginalization of the Tribals continued in the face of continuous flow of illegal migrants and it did not subside even with the dawn of independence. Instead, the misleading policies of the central and the state governments in post-independence era have only perpetuated the crisis. The central government’s inability to address the alienation of the people in appropriate time and manner, the indifference of the state government towards the demands of various minority communities of the region, the deprivation of the plains tribals from the special status granted under the Fifth and the Sixth Schedules of the Indian Constitution and the language policy of the Government of Assam in the form of imposition of Assamese as the official language and the medium of instruction in 1960 and 1972 respectively have helped to sustain and deepen the ethnic identity problem in Assam.

Thus, each community in Northeast has its own history which precipitated its identity crisis and led it to the path of movement. The Bodo is no exception to that. Historically, the Bodo community has migrated from Central Asia such as China, Mongolia, Tibet and Siberia through the upper Burma in search of greener pasture and better living. They settled down in groups in several parts of Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Tripura and Assam. Over the years, there occurred differences in the socio-cultural practices of these groups and they acquired
separate tribe names in different parts of their settlement. In the Brahmaputra valley, they came to be known as Boros, Rabhas and Koches, in North Cachar as Sonowals and Dimasas and as Tripuris in Tripura.

Bodos are one of the earliest inhabitants of Assam. They entered Assam at about 1000 B.C (Chatterjee 2007: 26) and came in contact with the North Indian Aryans during the age of Mahabharata. They were then known as Kiratas or Asuras or Mlechhas. They settled in and ruled parts of Assam for a long period of time even after the advent of the Ahoms. They founded several dynasties throughout the North-Eastern part of India, such as, Bhauma dynasty (up to 350 A.D.), Varman dynasty (350 A.D.-650 A.D.), Salastamba dynasty (650 A.D.- 990 A.D.), Pala dynasty of Kamrupa (990 A.D.-1142 A.D.) and Kachari dynasties of Dimapur (up to 1540 A.D.), Maibong (1540 A.D.-1757 A.D.) and Kashpur (1757 A.D.-1832 A.D.) (Basumatary 2009: 56). Bodo rule in Assam came to an end with the death of Gabinda Chandra, the last Bodo king of Khaspur in 1832. After that the kingdom was transferred to the British East India Company through the policy of 'Doctrine of Lapse' as the king Gabinda Chandra died heirless. However, a small part of the kingdom was ruled by Tularam Senapati, the army chief of King Gabinda Chandra and his two sons till 1854.

Since the annexation of Assam by the East India Company in 1826, the Bodos have started losing their hold in Assam. The massive flow of migrants from the then East Bengal, Nepal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and China during the Colonial period also affected the socio-economic condition of Bodos. Continuous flow of illegal migrants from adjoining countries and encroachment of non-tribal people from the neighboring areas into the tribal dominated regions of Assam created the problem of land alienation for the Bodos. During that time the Bodos were ignorant of the land record (or land holding) system as well as incapable of competing with Muslim labourers migrating from the then East Bengal in agricultural activities. A section of Assamese traders basically from Barpeta subdivision (now district) of Kamrup district took advantage of those ignorant Bodo People and accumulated a large volume of cultivable land from them through the
practice of forward trading (fixing the price of the crops before harvesting) in which mortgage of land was an important part for the non-fulfillment of the conditions of the forward contract (Roy 1995: 25). Increase in land revenue and its payment in currency introduced by the British further complicated the situation. As a result, two tribal peasants’ rebellion broke out against British in 1861 and 1894. In both the uprisings, the Bodo peasants participated in the largest number (Pegu 2004: 71). But there was no agitation for separate identity of the Bodos till that time. Movement for establishing distinct identity of the Bodos was first initiated by Shri Kalicharan Brahma, a social reformer, in the first decade of the 20th century. He realized that the identity of the Bodos as community was in serious threat. Incessant migration, the assimilationist attitude of the Assamese leadership and rapid religious conversion of tribals to Hinduism and Christianity were instrumental behind such fear. A socio-religious movement known as ‘Brahma Movement’ was launched in the first half of the 20th century. Large number of Bodos accepted the Brahma religion sermonized by Kalicharan Brahma within a short span of time. That is how ‘Brahma’ became the surname of a large number people in Bodo Community. Apart from his religious venture, Kalicharan Brahma also established many schools and encouraged promotion of business and trade, sericulture and horticulture to ensure economic self reliance of the Bodos. Education was made compulsory for the Bodo children and the guardians failing to send their children to school were penalized with fines (Daimary 2005: 101). This socio-religious movement achieved further momentum with the active participation of Boro Chattra Sonmiloni, a students’ union which was formed in 1919. The student leaders of the organization took up the task of creating literature in Bodo language and also of awakening consciousness among the ignorant Bodo masses. A memorandum was also submitted to the Simon Commission in 1928 by the Assam Kachari Jubak Sanmilani (AKJS) and Dhubri Boro Juvok Sanmiloni (DBJS) demanding a separate electorate for the Bodos and other tribes of Assam. A political party known as All Assam Tribal League (AATL) was formed in 1933 embracing all the tribes of Assam which aimed at securing representation in the law making bodies of the state. Similarly, on 16th November, 1952 Bodo Sahitya Sobha (BSS)
was formed. One of the main purposes of the formation of BSS was to develop and expand Bodo language by introducing it as the medium of instruction in schools in Bodo majority areas of Assam. However, the movement for separate identity of the Bodos was still in a nascent stage and largely apolitical in nature. The identity movement of the Bodos gained popularity only in the second half of the 20th century with the active support of All Bodo Students’ Union, Plains Tribal Council of Assam, All Tribal Women Welfare Federation, All Bodo Women Welfare Federation, United Tribal National Liberation Front and others. Several memorandums were submitted during that time demanding a separate political arrangement named ‘Udayachal’ (with the status of Union Territory) which later on transformed into the demand of autonomous region and also of separate state of ‘Bodoland’. As a result of sustained campaign for this separate political arrangement, an accord was signed on 20th Feb, 1993 and Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was formed. But it failed to satisfy the aspirations of all the sections of the Bodo society mainly because of its failure to demarcate a clear-cut boundary for administration. Besides, the large forest areas of Indo-Bhutan international border on which the Bodo people are dependant for their daily livelihood was not included within BAC on grounds of security and strategic importance. Besides, the BAC had no constitutional safeguard as it was created under the State Act. As a result, the ground for another phase of movement gained momentum. This movement began in 1996 and came to an end with the formation of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) on 10th Feb, 2003. But it also failed to fulfill the expectations of the Bodos. The Bodo leaders felt that identity, survival and economic prosperity of the Bodos, for which the movement was launched, were not realized under the BTC as well. This resulted in the continuation of the movement under All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU). A mass rally was organized on 2nd March, 2010 at Kajalgaon in Chirang district under ABSU to protest against the formation of the BTC. Memorandums were submitted to PM Dr. Manmohan Singh and Home Minister Shri P. Chidambaram with a demand for a separate state of Bodoland. Another rally was also organized on 28th October, 2010 in Delhi from Ramlila Maidan to Parliament with same demand. But the goal of the separate state of Bodoland was not achieved and as a
result, the agitation of the Bodos continues. Thus, it is evident that the ethnic identity movement of the Bodos is a long drawn battle. Since the early decades of the twentieth century to till date, it is continuing. Beginning with the modest attempt to awaken socio-cultural identity of the Bodos, the present demand of the movement is a separate State of Bodoland. In this backdrop, the present study intends to understand the roots and causes of this long drawn ethnic identity movement and its implications on the socio-political life of the people as it may throw light not only in the nature of Bodo ethnic identity struggle but also in the ethnic identity movements of North-east India in general.

**Conceptual Framework**

The present study “Politics of Identity: A Case Study of Bodos in Assam” is about understanding the meaning of politics of identity, how does it lead to identity movement and how does ethnicity constitute an important factor of identity movement. The answer to these questions necessitates a conceptual understanding of what does ‘politics of identity’, ‘ethnicity’ or for that matter ‘Bodo’ about whom the study is undertaken mean in general and in the present context in particular. The inter-linkage between ethnicity and identity is also an important aspect to deal with in context of the present study.

**Ethnicity and Identity**

Politics of identity or identity politics is one of the most widely discussed issues in the academia today. Politics of identity is generally understood as a phenomenon which leads to a counter movement to protest against oppression and injustice that is met out to various communities on the basis of their racial, religious, cultural, gender or ethnic identity. Identity politics begins with the process of identity formation of certain sections of the society who consider them to be oppressed and marginalized. Such construction of self-identity may originate on the basis race, gender or an ethnic consciousness of a group. However, mere sense of belonging to certain identity does not crystallize into a
movement. It leads to a movement only when the symbols of identities (e.g. language, race or ethnicity) are utilized by elites to mobilize group sentiments (Brass, 1999: 15). Identity movements may be of various kinds. It may be of feminist, racial, linguistic, religious, ethnic or of some other kind like LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) identity movements. Feminist identity movement occurred as a reaction to the perennial subjugation of women in socio-economic and political life, racial identity movement occurred in South Africa and other western nations mainly against suppression of the Black people. LGBT movement was committed to secure recognition for the ‘other type’ of sexual orientations (Valelly 2012: 313) of some people. Among different forms of identity politics, politics of identity based on ethnicity is one of most serious kind. Throughout the world, people of different ethnic groups are asserting for their rights which resulted in conflicts and violence. Issues of Greeks in Albania, Turks in Bulgaria, Jews in Hungary, Kurds in Germany, Hmong in Thailand are few examples of those conflicts. In response to those ethnic assertions, attempts are being made by states to resolve the crisis by granting some safeguards and autonomy to the dissent groups. But such moves of the government have failed to arrest the spur of ethnicity. Rather, it is growing very rapidly with every passing day. States with multi-cultural societies like India, Bangladesh, Australia, Canada and Germany are so much affected by the problem of ethnicity that the process of national integration and socio-economic development are jeopardized, to certain extent, in those societies. In this context, politics of identity based on ethnicity has become a phenomenon of universal importance.

This phenomenon of universal importance may be viewed from two broad perspectives- Primordial and Instrumental (Hutchinson & Smith 2009, p. 8). From the Primordial point of view, ethnicity is a ‘natural’ and ‘given’ phenomenon. Every individual carries with him some attachments derived from his/her place of birth, kinship, religion, language and social practices which are natural to him, spiritual in nature and provide a basis for an easy affinity with other people from the same background (Brass 1999: 69). Thus, the core of such
attachments are rooted on descent and do not evolve as result of social interactions. However, the irony is that there are only a few men folk in the world who can claim of a pure common descent or origin. Therefore it is not actually descent, but the belief in a common descent which leads to the formation of an ethnic group.

Instrumentalists, on the other hand, believe ethnic identity as a socially constructed phenomenon and the product of human choices and actions. It is the “creation of elites who draw upon, distort, and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their well being or existence or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as for themselves” (1999: 8). According to them, the process of ethnic identity formation always involves competition and conflicts among the elites for political power, economic benefits and social status both within and among different ethnic groups. Ethnic consciousness, according to Paul R Brass, can occur only when there is some conflict either between indigenous and external elites or between authorities and indigenous elites. He mentioned four types of ethnic conflicts, such as, between local aristocracy attempting to maintain its privileges against an alien conqueror; between competing elites of various religious groups, between religious elites and native aristocracy of different ethnic groups and between native religious elites and an alien aristocracy (1999: 89-90). Thus, the two approaches emphasize different factors as responsible for the formation and persistence of ethnicity and ethnic identity movement. The primordial approach emphasizes on mobilization of the groups in defense of their established beliefs and faiths based on their customs and traditions, while instrumentalist approach considers ethnicity as the creation of elites to reap and perpetuate their socio-political interests.

In case of Bodos, both the approaches bear relevance. Bodos have been clamouring long to preserve their distinct identity which is rooted in their history, religion, culture, customs and traditions. Their feeling of distinctiveness and sense of respect for their culture is very high. Thus, the apprehension of losing
their distinctiveness to the assimilationist forces of Assamese nationalism has been, to a great extent, responsible for the rise of ethnic identity consciousness among Bodos. On the other hand, this sense of distinctiveness and belonging of Bodos was also utilized by the political elites for their self interest and support. Keeping in mind these realities of the Bodo society, both primordial as well as instrumental approaches are adopted in the present study.

**What is Politics of Identity**

Politics of Identity thus may be defined as a phenomenon that arises out of shared experiences of injustice and marginalization of certain sections of the society. It occurs when some ethnic groups or social minorities find themselves as oppressed, marginalized and feel that their uniqueness and distinctiveness are under threat from the majority group. In such situation, there is collective mobilization within the group with a view to secure their distinct identity. Identity politics tends to portray differences and grievances rather than similarities and bonds among groups and individuals. It refers to a process of self-construction and self-presentation of group traits like race, culture, religion, ethnicity and gender with a view to secure social recognition and legal concessions. Thus, it is also identified as the politics of ‘recognition’ (Brunt 1989: 150) and the politics of ‘differences’ (Young 1990: 130-131). As regards the causes of identity politics, there exist two contradictory approaches—materialistic and non-materialistic approaches. The advocates of materialistic approach consider identity politics and identity movement as reaction to economic inequality and economic exploitation (Bernstein 2005: 49). According to them, the solution of such problems, therefore, lies in economics. Contrary to it, proponents of non-materialistic approach focus on non-material traits like culture, social values, tradition, language, religion, gender and race as the sources of identity politics. It rejects the notion that economic factor is central to any political action and emphasizes on non-material factors of identity politics (Bondi 1993: 82).
For the first time, the term ‘identity politics’ was used by Anspach in the late 1970s and since then the concept has gained popularity. The term was used widely in social science to describe phenomena like multiculturalism, feminism, civil rights and separatist movements in Canada and violent ethnic mobilization in postcolonial Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. History has witnessed the emergence of several separatist movements and violent ethnic mobilization in the 20th century. The issues of Balkans in Europe, Hutus and Tutsis in Africa, Tamils in Srilanka, Chakmas in Bangladesh, Muhajirs in Pakistan and Moros in Philippines are some of the examples of identity politics emanating from ethnicity. The ethnic identity movement of Bodos in the 20th century is also one of such kind. Thus, in this study, the term identity politics will be used to mean the political claims and demands made by different groups of people to secure and preserve their distinct ethnic identity.

The Concept of Ethnicity

The term ethnicity is derived from the Greek word ‘ethnos’ which means ‘heathen’ or ‘pagan’ (Hutchinson & Smith 2009: 28). From mid-fourteenth century to mid-nineteenth century, the term was used in this sense. In the United States of America, it was used throughout the Second World War to mean Jews, Italians, Irish and other groups of people inferior to the dominant groups (2009: 28). Aristotle in his ‘Politics’ used the term to refer to foreign or barbarous nations (2009: 19). According to Paul R Brass, “any group of people dissimilar from other people in terms of objective cultural criteria and containing within its membership, either in principle or in practice, the elements for complete division of labour and of reproduction forms an ethnic category” (Brass 1999: 19). The objective cultural markers, according to Brass, may be the language or dialect, distinctive dress or diet or customs, religion or race. This definition emphasizes on the cultural basis of ethnicity and distinguishes ethnic categories from other social categories based on class, gender or age groups. J. Hutchinson and A.D. Smith mentioned six main features of an ethnic group (Hutchinson & Smith 2009: 6-7). These are:
• A common proper name to identify and express the ‘essence’ of the community,
• A myth of common ancestry,
• Shared historical memories,
• One or more elements of common culture,
• A link with a homeland, which will create attachment to the ancestral land, and
• A sense of solidarity among the people of the community.

Max Weber defines ethnic group as “those human groups that share a subjective belief about their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists” (2009: 35). This sense of common identity which is motivated by political community tends to persist even after the disintegration of the political community, unless there exists visible differences in their customs, physical features and languages. E. Hunter and Phillip Whitten used the term to refer to “any group of people within a larger cultural unit who identifies themselves as a distinct entity, separate from the rest of that culture” (Pakem 1990: 27). This distinctiveness of identity may originate from separate language, culture, traditions and social customs. However, scholars of the 20th century, particularly in its second half, had developed some sort of consensus about the meaning of the term ethnic or ethnicity. Today, most of the social scientists use the term to mean “a social group which consciously shares some aspects of a common culture and is defined primarily by descent” (Pakem 1990: 36). Like race, ethnicity also involves the element of descent. But while race is not culture based, the ethnic group is based on cultural identity. Ethnicity is a sense of ethnic identity (Vos & Ross 1975: 16). It creates internal cohesion and differentiates from other groups (Brass 1999: 19). Ethnicity may also refer to the sense of people hood or we feeling shared by members of the group. Any group that shares this feeling is an ethnic group. It
also involves “the claims and demands for recognition and status as a superior group or as a group at least equal to other groups” (1999: 19).

Ethnicity can be of two types- homeland societies and diaspora communities. Ethnic groups belonging to homeland societies are the long time occupant of a particular place. They claim for a moral right to rule themselves on the basis of historical and archeological evidences. Diaspora communities, on the other hand, are people who have migrated and settled in a foreign land either after undergoing oppression in their homeland or in search of better livelihood or for any other reason (Hutchinson & Smith 2009: 316). They do not generally claim for self rule. Instead their demand focuses on an equal status and role in public sphere with an opportunity to preserve their culture. In the present study, the term ethnicity or ethnic group is used to mean any social group which consciously shares some aspects of a common culture and is defined primarily by descent. It includes only those people who are long time occupant of a particular place and claim for a moral right to rule themselves.

**Who is called Bodo**

The term ‘Bodo’ is understood differently in literature. There are differences of opinion among scholars regarding the use of the term. During the time of Ramayana and Mahabharata, Bodos were not known by this term. They were known as Danavas, Asuras, Kiratas and Mlechhas (Chatterjee 2007: 46). Dr S. K. Chatterjee used the term ‘Indo-mongoloid’ as synonymous to Kiratas (2007: 38). They were known to be the people who shaped the history of Assam, the then Pragjyotishpur or Kamrupa (Brahma 2008: 6). Rev. Sydney Endle referred Bodos as Kacharis. In Ahom Buranjis also, they were known as Kacharis. The term Bodo as a generic name was, for the first time, used by Hodgson in 1846 while he was writing about the Meches of Darjeeling District. In the pre-Vedic period, the land or the country western wards of china and north-eastern of Himalaya was known as ‘Bod’ (the home land) and accordingly, the name of the people inhabiting the land was also known as ‘Bod’ (Machahary 2004: 52).
Hence, it can be assumed that the term ‘Bodo’ might have been borrowed from ‘Bod’.

The word ‘Bodo’ is also called ‘Boro’. In Bodo language, the letter ‘d’ or ‘t’ are (in some cases) also pronounced as ‘r’ e.g. gidid (big) as ‘gidir’, ‘khat’ (to run) as ‘khar’, ‘thalit’ (banana) as ‘thalir’, ‘lid’ (washing of house by mud) as ‘lir’ etc (Machahary 2004: 53). G.A. Grierson used the term Bodo in his Linguistic Survey of India 1903. He included Meches, Sonowals, Boros, Tripuris, Deuris and Koches within the term Bodo. Some scholars use the term Bodo to refer to only those people who are known as Boros. Others use the term to include all the Tibeto-Burman speaking people of Sino-Tibetan origin other than Kuki-Chin. To them, the Boros, Koches, Rabhas, Lalungs, Hajongs, Chutiyas, Meches, Dhimals and Sonowals of Brahmaputra Valley and North Bengal, the Dimasas of North Cachar Hills, the Tripuris of Tripura and the Garos of Meghalaya belong to Bodo race (Barpujari 2007: 392). In the present study, the term ‘Bodo’ is used to mean the Boro speaking people of Brahmaputra Valley, particularly the four districts of Assam namely Kokrajhar, Chirang, Odalguri and Baksa. Other Bodo speaking people like Garo, Rabha, Dimasa, Tripuris, Hajong and Deuris are not covered by the term ‘Bodo’ in the present study.

To conclude it may be said that ethnicity or ethnic identity consciousness is one of the important factors that instigates politics of identity and leads to identity movement. In context of Northeast India, such identity movements have become regular phenomena. As a result the process of national integration and economic development in the region are hampered. The Government’s attempts to resolve the crisis through various piecemeal arrangements, such as, creation of autonomous regions, granting of special status and so on could not bring down the intensity and spread of identity movements in the region. Thus, the present study “Politics of Identity: A Case Study of Bodos in Assam” is significant as it is likely to reflect on the nature of identity movement in the region of Northeast India.
Review of Literature

The literature reviewed for the present study is as under.

“Politics of Identity: Ethnic Nationalism and the State in Pakistan” (Adeel Khan 2005) is a study that informs us of the politics and group interests in one of the most volatile countries in the world. A major challenge Pakistan has been confronted with since it came into existence is the self-assertion of various ethnic groups, which have actively contested the legitimacy of the state structure. Ethnic nationalism, the author argues, is a political issue and essentially a struggle for power between dominant and non-dominant groups. Highlighting the role the state plays in the lives of individuals, the book studies both the pre-colonial and colonial state system in India and the changes it effected till India’s independence and the creation of Pakistan. It also assesses the state in Pakistan and explains its role in giving rise to ethnic discontent. The study refers to four ethnic movements-Pukhtun, Baloch, Sindhi and Mahajir - demonstrating how their proximity to or distance from state power have influenced their politics. To understand the same, some important theories of nationalism are also critically reviewed including those of Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and Partha Chatterjee.

“Language Politics in Assam” (Sandhya Goswami 1997) is about the language movements in the state. In response to the imposition of Assamese as the official language in Assam in 1960, the state witnessed repercussions and protests from various other linguistic groups which took the form of movements in certain cases. A similar turn of events was experienced following the imposition of Assamese as a medium of instruction in all educational institutions of the state. Assamese feared that their linguistic identity was in crisis. Migration of Bengali population in the pre-independence as well as post-independence era had been most instrumental behind such anxiety. The development of tea industry and the migration policies of the colonial rule in Assam were responsible for such large
scale migration of population from the then East Bengal. Besides, people were migrating from other Indian states like Jharkhand, Orissa, and Rajasthan. As a result, there was seen land scarcity and the problem of land alienation in the state. Besides, as migrants were better trained, the white collar jobs of the state like teachers, advocates, doctors, engineers etc were also going to their share. This created the apprehension of losing identity and the fear of identity crisis in the Assamese psyche. Political leaders have tried to gain mileage and manipulated the situation in their favour. Accordingly, the Assam Official Language Act, 1960 was passed. On 23 September, 1972 a resolution was passed in Assam Assembly whereby it was resolved that the medium of instruction under Gauhati and Dibrugarh universities would be Assamese. Widespread protest movements were organized by the tribals and the Bengali speaking people of Barak Valley against these decisions of the State government. 67 people lost their lives. Thus, language became the central point of the movement not only because it provides employment opportunities to the people but also because it represents one of the important symbols of identity of a group.

“Politics of Ethnicity in North-East India with Special Reference to Manipur” (P. T. Hitson Jusho 2004) is about the political crisis in the state of Manipur. The North-Eastern region is an abode of various ethnic groups and each ethnic group has its own culture, language, religion and tradition. With the passage of time and the process of modernization, the tribal people have become more conscious of preserving their distinct and separate social and political identities. It also led to the emergence of identity movements in certain parts of Northeast. The case of Manipur is somewhat like that. The ethnic conflict in Manipur is more an outcome of the process of modernization than the instigation of the ruling elites. Manipur is a state inhabited by different ethnic groups and is faced with serious ethnic problems. The state is experiencing continuous conflicts between Nagas and Kukis, Kukis and Paites and Maiteis and Muslims since 1990 which has affected the prospect of development in the state. It has brought social disharmony and chaos in the society and has led to the emergence of various insurgent outfits in the name of preserving and protecting the interests of their
respective ethnic groups. In order to suppress the insurgency movements, the state government has imposed various armed forces acts like Punjab Security Act (AFSPA) 1953 and Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Power Act 1958 but without any desirable success. In order to bring peace, harmony and prosperity in the state, economic backwardness of the region must be addressed and black laws like AFSPA should be reconsidered on the basis of their performance in changing the situation.

“The Identity Politics of Peace-Building: Civil Society in War-torn Sri Lanka” (Comilla Orjuela 2008) critically examines the role of the civil society in identity conflicts. Contrary to the idea that civil society plays an important role in peace building, this book focuses that the civil society organizations and groups engaged in ‘peace work’ often fail to ensure the sense of security among civilians. They even fail to generate mass protest against such internecine quarrel. The relevance of the civil society in identity conflicts is minimal as the society itself gets split according to community sentiments.

“The Boro Imbroglio” (Ajoy Roy 1995) is about the history of the Bodo Community. Bodos are the earliest inhabitants in the region. They migrated from the eastern part of Tibet and western part of China through the upper Burma in search of better living. However, the decline in the socio-economic condition and the problem of land alienation that occurred in the 20th century had set the background for Bodoland movement. The constitutional provision depriving the sixth Schedule status to the Bodos and the Chauvinistic language policies of Assam Government also fuelled fire. Although the Bodoland Movement originated during 1960s mainly as a reaction to the language policy of the Government of Assam, there were other causes too. The movement acquired momentum slowly during 1980s and the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was created in 1993. But the movement did not end here. The failure of the BAC to fulfill the demands of the people in general has led the agitation to a different direction. The birth of the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) is directly the
outcome of the failure of the BAC. Thus a chronological narration of the
development of the Bodoland movement is discussed.

“Students’ Politics in Assam” (Monuj Phukan 2005) is about the role of All Tai
Ahom Students’ Union (ATASU) which was formed on 14th July, 1988 with
Promod Baruah and Arun Gogoi as president and secretary respectively. The
purpose of the Union was to represent the hopes and aspirations of the people of
the Tai Ahom Community and to ensure their socio-economic development. It
also aimed at the preservation of the historical monuments, sculptures and
traditions of the Tai community. In such venture, ATASU was successful to
certain extent. At present, ATASU’s focus is directed towards including the Tai
Ahom language as an optional subject in the educational institutions of Assam
and also ensuring tribal status to Tai Ahom Community.

“The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology and Identity” (Monirul Hussain 1995)
discusses about the anti foreigners’ agitation in Assam which began in 1979 and
came to an end in 1985 with the signing of the Assam Accord. The author plead
that the Anti-foreigners’ Agitation in Assam was more an instigation of Assamese
elites than an anti foreigner and identity crisis movement. Though the movement
pointed out the continuous flow of illegal migrants as the cause of identity crisis
of the Assamese people, the reality was not so. The migrants had also distinct
contribution in building up the economy of the state and flourishing a
composite culture in the state. But the ideologues of the movement i.e. the
Assamese elites, have distorted the reality to suit their self interests. Very
successfully, they mixed their class interests with the interest of the Assamese
nationality.

“Reclaiming Identity: A Discourse on Bodo History” (Jadav Pegu 2004) states
that Bodos had a self sufficient economy. They cultivated different types of crops
and maintained border trade with the Bhutanese, Chinese and Tibetans which
included the items like rice, cotton yarn, cloth, silk yarn, Chinese silk, dried fish
and so on. But such self-sufficient economy of the Bodos declined gradually. The
Moamoria rebellion (1769), the Burmese invasion of Assam (1817-26) and the new administrative set up of the British had led to the decline of the Bodo economy. The increasing rates of revenue and imposition of new taxes under the colonial administration further deteriorated the condition of the Bodos. In order to overcome this economic backwardness and protect them from the linguistic threat posed by the Assamiya Language Movement of 1960 and 1972, Bodoland Movement was launched in 1967 and it continues till today.

“Ethnic Mobilization and Violence in Northeast India” (Pahi Saikia 2011) explores the ethnic mobilization and violence in Assam and offers an explanation of the complex relationship between the ‘tribal’ groups and the dominant Assamese community in the state. It is argued that the lack of communication and respect on the part of the Assamese community towards tribal groups is the root cause of the ethnic identity movement of different tribal groups in the state. However, the book focuses on three tribal ethnic movements launched by the Bodos, Dimasas and the Misings and the strategies adopted by them for getting recognition and fulfilling their demands. Despite being the products of similar circumstances, the intensity, nature and success of these three ethnic identity movements differ from each other. Bodos have got engaged in a sustained and high intensity movement which is largely violent in nature, the Dimasas have adopted a middle path, while the Misings are pursuing the goals of autonomy through less disruptive methods. These differences in the nature and objectives of the movements were due to the varying degrees of expectations, geographical location and leadership quality.

“The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order” (Samuel P. Huntington 1997) is a hypothetical analysis of the post cold war world order. During the cold war period, societies and nations were divided on the basis of ideological differences such as the struggle between democracy and communism. But in the post cold war period, the most important distinction among the people is no longer ideological, political or economic. Rather, they are cultural. The new patterns of conflicts will occur along the boundaries of culture and patterns of
unity and solidarity will be formed within the cultural boundaries. The clash of civilization is not a clash between the princes, but between different cultures. The author draws a geographical map on cultural lines and identifies eight distinctive civilizations which are likely to confront in the forthcoming struggles. These are: Islamic, Sinic (centered on the "core state" of China), Western (with the United States as its core), Orthodox (with Russia as its core), Japanese, Hindu, Latin American, and (somewhat tentatively) African. But the most perilous clash of civilization is likely to arise from the interaction of Western arrogance, Islamic intolerance, and Sinic assertiveness. According to Huntington, the clash of the West with other civilizations of the world will bring almost a drastic decline in the economic, demographic and military power of all the major participants in the war. To avoid such inter-civilizational wars, states should refrain from intervening in conflicts in other civilizations. They must negotiate with each other to contain wars between the states.

“India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality” (Sanjib Baruah 2011) highlights the ongoing problems of insurgency and sub nationalism in Assam. It explores the political and economic history of Assam since the time it became the part of British India. The region witnessed the tension between pan-Indianism and Assamese sub nationalism since the early days of Indian nationalism. However, the situation in recent years is much alarming. Kidnappings, murders, extortions and ethnic violence have become everyday incidents in the state. It is argued that such incidents of insurgency, human rights abuses by government security forces and insurgents, ethnic violence, and a steady decline of the economy are largely the outcome of the strong centralizing tendency of the Indian federation. It is also argued that the Bodo demand for the separate state of Bodoland is not quite reasonable. There are many hurdles that stand on the way of realization of this demand. Small population, absence of geographical contiguity and the opposition of Assamese sub-nationalism to further divide the state will be the strongest obstacles towards the creation Bodoland as an independent state. However, a more decentralized federal
structure may help to manage and solve such sub national conflicts in a more efficient way.

“Political Economy of the Bodo Movement” (Keshab Basumatary 2012) examines Bodoland movement from human development perspective. It reveals that Bodos are lagging extremely behind in the state with regard to economic advancement and human resource development. Besides, there is the problem of exclusion from the mainstream economy. Socio-economic backwardness has also played an important role in initiating Bodo agitation. An inclusive model of development is, therefore, imperative to bring an end to any agitation along with addressing other issues of concern.

“The Bodo Movement and Women Participation” (S. C. Chaudhuri 2004) is about the role and participation of women in Bodoland movement. All Assam Tribal Women’s welfare Federation (AATWWF), the first Bodo women organization was formed on 14th July, 1986 as result of the mobilization of All Bodo Students’ Union. In 1993, this women organization changed its name into All Bodo Women’s Welfare Federation. During the Bodoland movement, Bodo women played a remarkable role. They performed the duty of messengers and made proper communication between the villagers and Bodo Volunteer Force (BVF), a military wing of ABSU. Some of the young women members were trained to nurse the patients of critical injuries. They supplied food and provided shelters to BVF. They also participated in all meetings and rallies organized during the movement. However, in doing so they had to face different types of harassment and sexual abuse. Women were molested, beaten, raped and tortured. For instance, nine Bodo Girls and one old woman (ranging from 13 to 50 years of age) was gang raped at No. 12 Bhumka in Kokrajhar district of Assam by the Assam Police (AP) and Assam Police Task Force (APTF) on the nights of 25th and 27th January of 1988. Many Bodo women were also arrested and put in jail. All Bodo Women’s Welfare Federation fought against all these injustices. They fought in Gauhati High Court against Assam Police who was involved in this infamous Bhumkha gang rape case.
“Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison” (Paul R. Brass 1999) describes ethnicity and nationalism as socio-political construct. These are not given or natural phenomena. Rather, these are the creation of elites. The elites exploit the emotions and sentiments of the ethnic groups in order to gain their political, economic and social benefits. Competition among the elites for socio-economic and political mileage precipitates ethnic identity consciousness and ethnic conflicts. The cultural norms, values, customs and practices of the ethnic groups are the instruments for the elites to compete for political power and economic advantages. To substantiate this argument, the author cites the example of the custom of cow slaughtering among Muslims. In India, cow is worshipped by Hindus, while slaughtering of cows is a common practice among Muslims. This difference of tradition between Hindus and Muslims of India led to cow protection movement by the Hindu religious elites during 1880s and 1890s. Muslim religious and political elites found this movement as an act of Hindu domination over the Muslims and used it to gain political dividends which triggered a number of riots in 1893. The centralizing nature of the state further complicates the situation in a multi ethnic society and increases the possibilities of conflicts. Thus, devolution of enough power to the states to manage crises of various forms is needed to deal with ethnic conflicts in India.

“Ethnicity and National Integration in Bangladesh: A Study of the Chittagong Hill Tracts” (B.P. Baruah 2007) examines the problems of ethnicity and national integration in Bangladesh. The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh is inhabited by the tribals. The major tribes in the hill tracts are Chakmas, Marmas and Tripuris. For several decades, they maintained their distinct identity based on their culture, customs and traditions. Colonial rule also helped them to maintain their distinct identity and as such CHT region was granted the status of ‘excluded area’ along with certain amount of autonomy. But the constitutional amendment of Pakistan in 1963 which came into effect in 1964 ceased this special status of the CHT region. The creation of the new state of Bangladesh further increased the trouble of the region. No provisions were made for the tribal people and their
separate identity in the newly written constitution of Bangladesh. On the other hand, the new governments of Sheik Mujibur Rahman and Zia –Ur Rahman during 1970s tried to settle forcefully the non-tribals into Comilla, Khaokali and Mymensingh districts in CHT region so that the tribal population of the hill tract become minority and lose their distinctiveness in course of time. In response to such move of the Bangladesh government, a democratic movement for the autonomy of the tribals in the CHT region and upholding their separate ethnic identity was launched by Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) under the leadership of Manabendra Larma in 1972. In 1976 a military wing was added to this association which was named as Shanti Bahini. After several years of protest revolution, a peace accord was signed between the Government of Bangladesh and PCJSS on 2nd December, 1997. The agreement recognized the distinct identity and special status of the tribes and indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and established a Regional Council consisting of the three districts of the Hill Tracts namely Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban. A separate ministry to deal with the affairs of CHT region was also created. As per the provision of the peace accord, the Council would also be consulted whenever the Bangladesh Government enacts any law concerning the CHT people. However, the reluctant behavior of the Bangladesh government to implement the provisions of the peace accord has created the feeling of frustration among the tribal people. Though a broad agreement has been reached in the accord, a number of issues like withdrawal of armed forces and settlement of non-tribal people in the CHT region are yet to be resolved to the satisfaction of the tribal people of the CHT region.

“Dream for Udayachal and the History of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam” (Charan Narzary 2011) is about the history of Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA) and its demand for the creation of Udayachal- a homeland for the plains tribals of Assam. The PTCA was formed as a reaction to illegal migration and its impact on the marginalization of tribals in Assam. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s declaration for reorganization of the states in Assam in 1967 served as an immediate cause for the formation of PTCA. Initially, the PTCA demanded an
autonomous region in plains tribal dominated areas of the northern tracts of river Brahmaputra which would be inclusive of all the tribal belts and blocks within the region. The aim was to protect the land of the tribals, bring economic development in the region and conserve their language, culture, customs and traditions. This demand of the PTCA was upgraded to Union Territory status under the nomenclature of Udayachal in 1972. On 4th June 1977 the PTCA signed an agreement with Assam state unit of Janata Party whereby the latter agreed to address the problems of plains tribals as and when it comes to power. Consequently, a coalition government of Janata Party and PTCA was formed in 1978 with Golap Borbora as the Chief Minister of the state. However, the provisions of the agreement could not be fulfilled as the Janata Government remained in power only for 18 months. Support to Congress Ministry in 1980 also could not fulfill the demands of the PTCA. Rather, a struggle for power occurred within the party which ultimately resulted in the birth of a new political party known as United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) in 1984 under the leadership of B. K. Basumatary and Kankeswar Narzary, the former leaders of PTCA. However, soon there occurred disagreement between the two leaders which led to the formation of United Bodo Nationalist Liberation Front (UBNLF) under the leadership of Kanakeswar Narzary. All these in the long run, resulted in the dissolution of PTCA and paved the path for the emergence of All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) as the leader of the Bodo movement.

“Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India” (Sanjib Baruah 2005) explores the political meaning and significance of prolonged low-intensity conflicts in Northeast India. The author argues that if peace and development are to be brought to the region, India’s policy will have to be reoriented and linked to a new foreign policy towards Southeast Asia. In the midst of stubborn economic and political problems of Northeast India – trapped in the geopolitics of the colonial and post-colonial order, a transnational solution to the problem of the region may be thought of.

Apart from the books, following articles relating to the topic are also reviewed.
"Race and the Politics of Identity in Nepal" (Susan Hangen 2005) explores the genesis and development of racial politics in Nepal. Although politicization of race has never been in the history of Nepal, in recent decades, race is being used as a political tool to oppose the ruling authority. Rejecting their identity on ethnic and caste line, some ethnic groups in Nepal—including Gurungs, Magars, Rais, Limbus and Sherpas—began asserting that they all belong to a Mongol race. This consciousness of them was inspired by a political party named Mongol National Organization (MNO), which sought to unite and mobilize these ethnically diverse people to make major political changes in the state in its favour. MNO’s logic is that the population of Nepal is composed of two racial groups, the Aryans, who are caste Hindus, and the Mongols, who represent the country’s indigenous people. While the Aryans form only 20 percent of the population, they dominate the state and oppress the Mongols, who comprise 80 percent of the population. By identifying themselves as Mongols, the MNO and its supporters explicitly opposed the state’s classification of their people on castes or ethnic categories. By using the term Mongol, the MNO sought to mobilize the fragmented and obscure ethnic groups of Nepal into a united and globally recognized race. It appears that like the concept of indigenous people, race may also serve as a framework in Nepal through which the oppressed make political claims. The efforts of the United Nations to erase racism may reinforce the salience of race as an identity. Interestingly, outside Nepal, the term Mongol is primarily used to signify citizens of Mongolia rather than members of a racial group. In many parts of the world, the use of Mongol as a racial term sounds antiquated. Thus the MNO’s appeal to its fellow Mongols is unlikely to be heard or understood.

“Trajectory of Kashmiri Identity” (M. S. Bhat 2012) discusses the politics of identity in Kashmir. Politics of Identity in Kashmir is deeply rooted in its socio-cultural and historical background. But the present phase of identity politics in Kashmir is very complex. The eruption of militancy in 1989 has unfolded the very complex trajectory of identity politics in the region. The debate on autonomy was replaced by the demand for cessation or Azadi of the region. Some
believe that the hegemonic nature of Indian state has also contributed to such developments of the situation. What is needed is a gradual process of normalization to accommodate identity aspirations of different groups in the valley.

“Ethnic Assertion Among the Bodos of Assam: A Contextual Study of the Bodoland Movement” (D. P. Sharma 2007) examines the development of Bodoland Movement under All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) and Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC) during 1987 and 1993. As reaction to the campaign of Assamese cultural nationalism the Bodo movement demanded the creation of separate state of Bodoland, creation of Regional Council for non-Karbi Tribes in Karbi Anglong, Autonomous District Council and creation of autonomous Council for the tribals living in southern part of Brahmaputra valley. The movement also made other 89 additional demands which are of socio-economic and cultural nature. The movement passed through both violent and non-violent phases. After six years of sustained agitation, an agreement was signed between the state government and the leaders of the Bodoland movement and the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was created in 1993. Although the movement received moral support of various other organizations initially, with time it subsided. A suspicion took on other tribes that the Bodos being the majority tribe may try to assert over other groups in the state. Besides, the initial pledge of the movement to plead for the interest of other tribes also diminished with time. The 92-point charter of demands declared at the time of the birth of the movement has no mention about the demands of other tribes living in proposed Bodoland. This is suggestive of the fact that apprehension of other tribal groups about the intention of Bodos might have been correct to certain extent.

“Peace Accord and its Implementation with Special Reference to Mizoram” (A Dutta & R Bhuyan, 2007) is about the problem of insurgency and implementation of peace accord in Mizoram. Insurgency in Mizoram with its demand for ‘Independent Mizoram’ was an outcome of a number of factors. The impact of ‘Mautam’ famine (1959-60), Assamese Language Bill of 1960, the poor economy
of the region, cultural distinctiveness of the Mizo people and the irresponsible attitude of the Assam Government as regards the problems of Lushai hills are the factors which incited the Mizo crisis. The ‘Mautam’ (bamboo flowering) famine in 1959-60 has done serious damage to the agricultural economy of the Mizo people. With a view to bring relief measures to the sufferers of the ‘Mautam’ famine, an organization named Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) was formed in 1960 under the leadership of Pu Laldenga. But in course of time, the organization which was created to support the victims of ‘Mautam’ famine became an insurgent organization. The reason that has been instrumental for the transformation of the nature of the organization was the irresponsible attitude of the state government towards their demands. In this way, the Mizo National Front (MNF) was born in 1966 which launched and sustained twenty years of movement. During this long twenty years of Mizo insurgency movement, Mizoram has experienced insurmountable suffering and damage to the self-sufficient tribal economy of the hills. In the name of peace, Government of India employed its Air Forces to bombard people. Women and children became the worst victims. After several years of such insurgency movement, a peace accord was signed between the Government of India and Mizo National Front on 30th June, 1986 and a full-fledged state of Mizoram was created under the Chief Ministership of Pu Laldenga, the leader of MNF. Today, Mizoram has the distinction of being the most peaceful state in North-East India.

“Identity and Peace: Reconfiguring Conflict Resolution in Africa” (The African Journal on Conflict Resolution Vol-7, No-2, 2007) offers an in-depth explanation of conflict situation in post colonial Africa. It traces the genesis of clash of identities in Africa to the dual process of market liberalization and the process of democratization in 1990s which weakened the post colonial African states. Though multiples of identities existed in pre-colonial Africa, there was complete absence of politicization of ethnic and racial identities. Ethnicization of politics began in Africa with the construction of ethnicity as legal entity. As a habitual player of divide and rule policy, colonial administration used ethnicity for the purpose of political control, enforcement of taxes and extraction of wealth.
and divided the African society on ethnic fault lines. Africa’s post colonial states inherited these legacies of ethnic stereotyping and division of power within specific ethnic identities which have provided the ground for continuation of competition and conflicts in the region. Besides, the limitations of the liberal peace model of conflict resolution are discussed and an alternative approach to it i.e. reconfiguring framework of peace making is highlighted. In this model ethnic identities and cultural diversities are conceived as important elements of peacemaking rather than obstacles in conflict resolution.

“Ethnic Autonomy: A Challenge to Indian Democracy” (B.B. Kumar 2007) traces the genesis of the development of ethnic identity movement in North-East India to the British period and their policy of ‘divide and rule’. Subsequently, the division between plain and hill tribals over the Sixth schedule, the language policy of the Government of Assam in post-independence India has only helped to sustain and deepen the ethnic identity problem in the region. Since early 1960s tribal communities in the plains of Assam are demanding Autonomous Councils to preserve their ethnic identity and accordingly the Autonomous Councils were granted to Bodos, Missings, Rabhas and Tiwas. However, there are still other communities whose demand for autonomous council is yet to be fulfilled. The Government’s view point is that granting of autonomy is one of the ways to redress grievances of the tribal people and to maintain unity and integrity of the country. But experience has shown that the granting of autonomy is only a piecemeal solution to the problem. Unless autonomy is coincided with development, the issue of ethnic identity problem will continue to haunt peace in Northeast India.

The literature reviewed shows that most of the studies discussed either focused on the economic marginalization of the Bodos or the trend of homogenization of the majority ruling class as the cause of the identity movement of the community. Some studies also focus on the issue of migration as an important cause of Bodo identity crisis. Phase wise development of the Bodo movement was also focused upon in certain studies. But no study has been done exclusively to understand the
ethnic identity movement of the Bodos and its support base. In this context, the present study is important as it tries to understand the ethnic identity movement of the Bodos since its inception.

**Objectives of the Study**

1. To understand the genesis and development of the Bodoland movement;
2. To understand the support base of the movement; and
3. To understand the impact of the movement on the socio-political life of the Bodos.

**Hypotheses**

1. Bodoland movement is the outcome of the socio-political and economic marginalization of the Bodos.
2. Bodo insurgency emerged in Assam as consequence of the Bodoland Movement.

**Data Collection and Methodology**

**A. Study Area**

The study was conducted in Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) of Assam which embraces four districts namely Kokrajhar, Chirang, Bhaksa and Udalguri. It exists in the northern part of the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam and lies at 89°54′ East to 92°30′ East Longitudes and 26°18′ North to 26°54′ North Latitudes. BTAD covers an area of 8821.68 Sq. Km. and comprises 2890 villages. The total population of BTAD is 3155359 and it is surrounded by Santipur district in the east West Bengal in the west, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh in the north, Dubhri, Bangaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup and Darang districts of Assam in the South. The Headquarter of BTAD is Kokrajhar. The region covers three Parliamentary constituencies (two Lokh Sobha and one Rajya Sobha) and twelve State Legislative Assembly constituencies. The entire region
of BTAD is spread over 25 development blocks, 415 Village Council Development Committees (VCDC) and 2890 villages.

B. Data Collection

The present study is based on both Primary and Secondary data. Primary data were collected through an interview schedule from the members of political parties like Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA), Bodoland People’s Front (BPF), Bodoland People’s Progressive Front (BPPF), Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC), various literary and cultural organization like Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS), All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU), All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF), National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB-Talk Faction), All Bodo Employment Federation (ABEF) and the people who were competent to throw light in this regard, such as intellectuals like academicians, artists, journalists and so on. Secondary data were collected from books, newspapers, journals, Census Reports of India, Statistical Handbooks of Assam, Statistical Handbooks of Bodoland Territorial Council, memorandums and proceedings of All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU), Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and United Tribal National Liberation Front (UTNLF) during different periods of the Bodo movement.
C. Sample

For the present study a sample of 200 was selected from the four districts of Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) namely - Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri. Fifty respondents were selected from each district through purposive sampling. The sampling technique was purposive as it was considered that only a section of population will have an exhaustive knowledge about the problem of the Bodos. Out of a sample size of 200, 20 each was drawn from All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU), Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA), Bodoland People’s Front (BPF), Bodoland People’s Progressive Front (BPPF), Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC), Bodo Sahitya Sobha (BSS), All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF), National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB-Talk Faction), All Bodo Employment Federation (ABEF) and the members of the society. Thus, 5 members from each of the organization located in the four districts were selected, thereby making a total of 20 for each association.

Table 1.01: Distribution of Respondents in the Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizations</th>
<th>Total Number of respondents interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kokrajhar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSU</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPAC</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTCA</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABWWF</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABEF</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPF</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPPF</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSS</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDFB (Talk Faction)</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other members of the Society</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note- ABSU= All Bodo Students’ Union, BPAC= Bodo People’s Action Committee, PTCA=Plains Tribal Council of Assam, ABWWF= All Bodo Women Welfare Federation, ABEF= All Bodo Employment Federation, BPF= Bodoland People’s Front, BPPF= Bodoland People’s Progressive Front, BSS=Bodo Sahitya Sobha, NDFB=National Democratic Front of Boroland.*
D. Estimation Procedure

After collection of primary data, the same was classified and presented in the Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheet and converted into tables, charts, diagrams and so on. And on the basis of it, the data were analyzed and interpreted objective wise. Along with primary data, secondary data collected from books, newspapers, journals, Census Reports of India, Statistical Handbooks of Assam, Statistical Handbooks of Bodoland Territorial Council, memorandums and proceedings of All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU), Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and Bodo Peoples Action Committee (BPAC) were also simultaneously used for analysis and interpretation. It was done primarily to understand the genesis and development of the Bodoland movement, its support base, and to understand the impact of the movement on the socio-political life of the Bodos.

Chapterization

For an elaborate presentation of the findings, the thesis has been divided into six chapters:

Chapter – 1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed outline of the present study under the following heads:

- The Statement of Problem
- Conceptual Framework of the Study
- Review of Relevant Literature
- Objectives of the Study
- Hypothesis
- Methodology, and
- Chapterization
Chapter – 2 Setting and Sample

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section I deals with the profile of Assam which discusses about its demography, culture, geography, economy and administrative divisions. Section II deals with the profile of Bodoland Territorial Area District comprising the geography, economy and demography and section III presents the profile of the sample districts i.e. Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri which constitute the universe of the study.

Chapter-3 Historical Background

In this chapter, the migration and settlement of Bodos in Northeast, the establishment of their kingdoms, the advent of the British and the marginalization of Bodos and the subsequent rise of identity politics in the region are thoroughly discussed. For the convenience of presentation, the chapter is divided into three sections. Section I covers the mythological period, Section II covers the historical period including pre-colonial and colonial time and Section III deals with the post-colonial modern period.

Chapter-4 Group Mobilization and Identity Formation of the Bodos

In any ethnic movement group mobilization and identity formation forms an important aspect. The success and failure of an ethnic movement greatly depends on the techniques and strategies adopted by the leaders for the mobilization of the movement. This chapter discusses the
process of group mobilization and identity formation of the Bodos under various socio-cultural organizations and political parties like Boro Chatra Sanmiloni, All Bodo Students Union, Plains Tribal Council of Assam, Bodo Liberation Tiger Force, and National Democratic Front of Boroland.

Chapter-5 Analysis of Data and Interpretation

In this chapter data were analyzed, interpreted and the results of the study are discussed in detail. Measures suggesting solution to the Bodo problem are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter-6 Conclusions

This chapter presents the summary of the study with its major findings. Besides, the limitations of the study and scope for further research are also discussed in this chapter.